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State Dept. Gets Briefings as Israeli Spy Case Unfolds

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WASHINGTON—Senior State Department officials, concerned by new indications that the Israeli government has concealed evidence of broader espionage operations against the United States than it has admitted, now are receiving daily updates on a Justice Department probe of the alleged spying, a department source said Friday.

And, amid rumors of an "imminent" plea bargain that would avoid a public airing of the politically sensitive issue, it was learned that the State Department's legal counsel met with top Israeli officials in Jerusalem this week to discuss the U.S. espionage case against Jonathan Jay Pollard, a former Navy intelligence analyst.

Pollard was charged last November with passing secret U.S. military documents to Israeli officials in Washington, and his wife, Anne Henderson-Pollard, later was charged with possessing classified national security documents.

Their cases, once dismissed by Israeli officials as an isolated and unauthorized lapse of discretion, now are believed by U.S. officials to be only one part of an organized and well-financed Israeli spying network in this country, several government sources have told The Times.

The new evidence of espionage—provided in part by Pollard during plea negotiations with Justice Department prosecutors—have linked an Israeli air force officer and others to espionage activities here, said the sources, who declined to be identified.

One source said that charges are likely to be filed against at least one other person in the spy probe, which is said to be pursuing several leads.

Armed with the new evidence, State Department legal counsel Abraham Sofaer took up the Pollards' cases with senior Israeli officials this week while in Jerusalem to mediate an Israeli-Egypt border dispute, a department official said.

Details of that discussion were not disclosed, but The Times reported Thursday that the State Department is "urgently" seeking an explanation from Israel of the new espionage evidence.

Sofaer led an American team to Israel last December to investigate Israel's role in the Pollard spy cases. After its mid-December return to the United States, the State Department said Israel had fully cooperated with the probe and told the Americans that the Pollards acted "without authority" of their government.

Limited Charges to Pollards

The inquiry panel said then that no grounds to prosecute anyone other than the Pollards had been found.

In the only official American comment on the Pollard affair so far, State Department spokesman Charles Redman said Friday that the United States stands by that Dec. 20 statement.

However, the new evidence of Israeli espionage came to light well after that statement, and Sofaer is now being informed of the progress of the Justice Department's investigation on a daily basis.

The State Department official refused to say whether that information is then being relayed to the Israelis.

Sofaer was scheduled to arrive in Washington Friday evening from Cairo.

Lid Clamped on Comments

Word of the behind-the-scenes actions came as the Reagan Administration clamped a lid on official comments about Israeli espionage in advance of court action on the Pollard cases, expected as early as next week.

Redman said only that the Justice Department "has not yet brought the (Pollard) case to its conclusion."

Both he and a Justice Department spokesman Friday explicitly rejected reports by government

sources that the two agencies were locked in a dispute about how much of the Israelis' espionage activity should be disclosed publicly and prosecuted.

Justice spokesman Pat Korten denied "in the strongest terms" any disagreements between the two sides, saying Secretary of State George P. Shultz is "completely aboard" the Justice Department's efforts to ferret out any espionage activity of any nation. Redman said the two agencies are working together closely on the Pollard case.

Sources Discussed State Dept.

Sources said earlier this week, however, that State Department officials were seeking to minimize publicity over the spying cases to avoid injuring the coalition government of Prime Minister Shimon Peres. They said the department's officials have sought a quick and quiet settlement of the charges against the Pollards, preferably with guilty pleas and reduced sentences instead of indictments and trials.

"Here you've got a prosecutable case, and people at State are saying, for policy reasons, that we can't pursue it," one source said.

Times staff writer Ronald J. Ostrow contributed to this story.